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ABSTRACT

This collection of papers by participants in the Puget Sound Writing Project (Washington) includes discussions of ideas and strategies that have been used in classrooms and that are based on clear theoretical principles. The topics discussed in the nine entries are: writing as a process through which students discover what is on their minds, characteristics of effective writing assignments, issues surrounding assignment making, class activities that generate ideas for writing, multisensory stimulation as an important part of the writing process, the difficulty and the reward of writing, activities used in an intermediate school English center to help students with writing, peer group editing and improvement in student writing, and the use of a writing workshop in which the students are the audience for each writer. The book also contains a poem that captures the process metaphor in a description of boat building. (TJ)

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The How's of Teaching Composition

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ANNE RUGGLES GERE, editor

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Because this monograph grew directly out of the first Summer Institute of the Puget Sound Writing Program (PSWP), thanks are due to the many people and institutions who support the program. Donna Gerstenberger, Chair of the University of Washington's English Department, provided a home as well as tangible and intangible support for the PSWP. Other helpful University of Washington administrators include: George Beckmann, Provost; Ronald Geballe, Dean of the Graduate School; and Marion Marts, Dean of the Summer Quarter. The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Bay Area Writing Project and the office of Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction provided essential financial assistance to the PSWP.

Perhaps the most important assistance came from the seven area school districts--Auburn, Bellevue, Federal Way, Northshore, Renton, Seattle and Tacoma--and the two community colleges--Shoreline and South Seattle Community College--who nominated outstanding teachers, underwrote costs and encouraged professional development among their staffs. In a time of shrinking budgets I am heartened to find districts recognizing the importance of faculty development. The relationship between the Washington State Council of Teachers of English (WSCTE) and the PSWP has, from the beginning, been a mutually supportive one. Sandra Clark, Past President, and Eugene Smith, President of WSCTE, have played important roles in establishing and maintaining the vitality of the PSWP. It is therefore fitting that this monograph represents the combined efforts of the two groups.

Many people made my task of editing easier. All 25 participants in the PSWP's 1978 Summer Institute enriched my thinking on composition pedagogy. The authors who emerged from that

group wrote and rewrote as I requested revisions. Nancy Jones (Interlake High School, Bellevue) Gary McLaughlin (Port Angeles High School), and Charles Schuster (English Department, University of Washington) members of WSCTE, served as readers and made many helpful suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching writing is one of the most complex and challenging tasks facing any English Language Arts teacher. Wishing to explore and perhaps offer help with this difficult task, the Washington State Council of Teachers of English proposed a series of monographs on composition. The first in the series, The "Why's" of Teaching Composition addressed two questions: Why teach composition? What are the characteristics of good writing? Articles in that monograph discussed sources of motivation toward and satisfaction in writing. This, the second monograph in the series, addresses a more practical and more diffuse question. If we have designated writing a worthwhile activity, how do we best teach it?

Many publications offer advice on what English Language Arts teachers should do, a few describe what English Language Arts teachers actually do, and a small number share strategies which have survived the scrutiny and benefited from the refinements offered by several English Language Arts teachers. The How's of Teaching Composition is a publication of the last sort. All the articles in this collection were written by participants in a program which grew out of the conviction that writing instruction can be improved by bringing together teachers from all grade levels who have demonstrated excellence in writing instruction. By sharing their expertise, by learning from one another and from specialists in the field, and by doing a great deal of writing themselves, these teachers would become even better instructors and would help improve the teaching of writing in their schools.

The PSWP invited seven area districts and two community colleges to nominate outstanding teachers of composition for the first (1978) Summer Institute. These teachers were screened

by the PSWP staff, and the resulting group contained excellent English Language Arts teachers from grades one through fourteen. During the Summer Institute these teachers refined their skills by sharing and receiving critiques on their methods of teaching composition. In addition they had an opportunity to learn about new theories of composition instruction and to participate in writing workshops. Their participation in the PSWP did not end as they returned to their classrooms in the fall. They continued to meet as a whole group on a monthly basis, and several of the smaller writing workshops went on with their regular meetings during the academic year. The monthly meetings provided opportunities for further discussion of ideas and strategies introduced in the Summer Institute. What appeared clear and useful in July did not always seem the same after class in December. The ideas contained in these pages, then, have survived the hard questions of peer teachers and the acid test of classroom implementation.

But these articles represent more than classroom-tested gimmicks. Each is founded on clear theoretical basis, and many draw upon research findings. Robert Kerns draws upon motivational theory as he discusses students' need to write, and he also provides a coherent explanation of the writing process as he discusses what happens when students become ready to write. Viewing writing as process rather than product, is a common theoretical stance in all the articles of this monograph. The more the members of the PSWP scrutinized their own writing practices, read research and questioned one another's teaching strategies, the more they became convinced of the importance of seeing writing in dynamic terms. Words such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and proofreading punctuated their conversations, and they recognized increasingly the limitations of product-oriented composition instruction. Both Robin

Logan and Cathy Butler emphasize the writing process as an important component of setting assignments. Logan's characteristics of good assignments are amplified by Butler's discussion of issues surrounding assignment-making.

Karen Nordland, the daughter and part-time assistant of a local ship builder, captures the process metaphor in a description of boat building in her poem. Carolyn Olson reminds us that multi-sensory stimulation is an important part of the writing process for students of all ages. The environment does influence the final written product. Taking the perspective of one of his students, Tom Nunn dramatizes the difficulty and the great reward inherent in writing, and he shows how much writing can mean to all students, even those with limited academic goals. JoAnne Jugum outlines the myriad activities of her English Center to show how students in the intermediate grades approach the writing process. Susan Sailer underlines the importance of rewriting in the writing process as she describes methods for helping students become more effective revisers. In his description of the writing workshop Ralph Stevens offers a complete program of instruction, one which considers all aspects of the writing process.

None of these authors claims to offer brilliant innovations for composition teaching nor would they argue that theirs are the only ways to help students write better. What they do offer are thoughtful, research-based methods of teaching composition, methods which suggest how we might do our jobs better. Like the PSWP itself, they represent a beginning and an invitation to examine more closely the ways we teach composition.

Anne Ruggles Gere, Director
Puget Sound Writing Program

IT'S OK IF YOU DON'T TEACH COMPOSITION

Robert Kerns

I attended a meeting a few weeks ago where a group of teachers of composition gathered to discuss effective ways to teach writing. Each teacher was to take a few minutes to tell about a successful lesson he or she had used in the classroom recently. An opening comment by one of the group particularly impressed me. He started, "I'm not sure I am a teacher." What he meant was that he, at that time, didn't have a steady teaching position. I laughed when I heard him say it, because sometimes I feel the same way and I do have a steady job.

I thought about that statement for some time. In fact I wrote it down and saved it. I finally came to the conclusion (or came to the realization of something I probably thought all along) that when it comes to composition I am sure I am not a teacher. No one teaches anyone how to write; people learn to write if they want to or if they need to. If I believe this, and right now I do, then I have to go about making my students want to write and I also have to give them reasons to need to write. I try to do both of these in my sixth grade classroom.

I use several methods of giving my students a need to write. I have forms for all sorts of things. There's a question form for asking a question. This is to be used if raising a hand doesn't get a response. There's an application form to be used for applying for a job, such as school patrol, school librarian, kitchen helper or a specific job within the classroom. There's a form for complaining, a form for suggesting, and a form for explaining when trouble arises.

Each member of the class has a chance to take a turn as an assistant to the teacher. One of

the requirements of this job is to keep a class log up-to-date. Keen observation is important. In January the class embarks on a voyage around the world (imaginary, with maps). The activity of the voyage is recorded along with a log of classroom activities.

There is a classroom post office where students can mail letters to each other and to me. (I answer all of my mail and participate in most of the writing assignments because I think it is important that students see their teacher writing.) We have a printing press in the room and try to do one publication during the year. It is usually a book of poetry written, set into type and printed by the students.

Before anything happens about writing in my class I have to get the idea out and circulating and known, that writing is a process and writing is discovery. I have to tell my students that a piece of writing becomes a product only after it goes through the process. Learning the process is more important than achieving a product at the beginning phase of writing. Not all writing assignments will become finished products.

The first phase of the process is the idea generating or the idea extracting phase. Students have to know there are ideas somewhere in their minds and they can get them out. I don't believe these ideas can come out or be discovered until the pencil moves along the paper. It's possible, but not as effective or not as easy, without actually starting to write, as most students find after staring at a blank page for awhile. A good way to get ideas out is by using a word list or "word cache" (I don't like the term word cache, because it sounds like you're hiding the words away where you can't see them. I like to think of them as visible and ready for use.) followed by a free-writing exercise. From the free-writing exercise comes the first draft.

The second part of the writing process is revision. Students in the sixth grade will listen

to me when I talk about drafts, but they don't believe in more than one. For anything over one draft they want "extra credit." I tell them we didn't have that when I was in school, but if they'd describe it to me I'd make sure they get it. They never ask about it again and never explain what the extra credit is. They seem to be satisfied just to be getting it. I tell them that along with extra credit they'll get better at writing too.

The revision process is still part of the discovery process in writing. Students have to learn they are free to change anything they want after they have completed a draft. They can add new material, change ideas, shift emphasis, rearrange paragraphs and even eliminate some parts. I ask the students to keep all their drafts in their folders. I think it's important that they see their work grow, see the results of effort. It's important, too, to give young writers enough time to get through this revision phase without feeling rushed.

I tell my students that the last part of the writing process is a kind of "house cleaning" job. It's the final proofreading. They are made quite aware of the importance of this final procedure when we print our yearly publication. As they sit at a case of type with a composing stick in one hand, looking at their final copy prepared for the typesetter, they learn the value of thorough proofreading.

After my students understand something about the total process of writing I have them start writing in a journal. I tell them this is a practice writing book. It's a place where they can experiment and save their ideas. In their journals they can write descriptions of events, descriptions of places or things, remarks and conversations overheard, interesting sounds, smells, sights and thoughts--anything that might be used in some future writing exercise or assignment. Many times I have them write their word

lists and free-writing exercises in their journals.

I want my students to find that writing is a process by which we learn what is on our mind, and perhaps what is on our mind is worth passing on. I feel it is my job to create this need and desire to write. If I can do that, I won't <u>have</u> to teach composition.

Crystal Springs Elementary
Northshore School District

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE ASSIGNMENTS

Robin Logan

During the 1978 Summer Institute of the Puget Sound Writing Program I assumed, in part, a student role and found myself receiving rather than giving writing assignments. Having to deal with the same frustrations that my students struggle with motivated me to seek to clarify for myself exactly what makes some assignments work while others do not. A combination of reading, experience and discussion with the K-16 composition teachers in the Puget Sound Writing Program generated the following list of characteristics of a good assignment: (1) The level of abstraction required is suitable for the students; (2) Topics are interesting to the teacher as well as the students; (3) Students are given necessary guidance in the writing process as it relates to their assignment; (4) The assignment specifies purpose and audience but does not dictate content or viewpoint; and (5) Teachers write the assignment themselves.

(1) The level of abstraction required is suitable for the students.

It may seem a statement of the obvious to remind ourselves that the level of abstraction of the assignment must be compatible with the thinking skills of our students. However, the temptation to lure students into comparing and contrasting before they can simply recall ten relevant facts on a topic is at times overwhelming. Developmental psychologists are quick to point out that higher level abstractions are generally not operant before students reach age ten or twelve. This would make an assignment such as "Discuss the Causes of the Civil War" inappropriate in

fifth grade. Classroom experience suggests that higher level thinking skills must be trained not assumed far beyond fifth or sixth grade. The caution then is simply to observe carefully what level of abstraction students are capable of and construct assignments that may stretch but do not exceed these bounds.

(2) Topics are interesting to the teacher as well as the students.

When selecting a topic I find it helpful to choose a subject or question that interests me. It is easier to motivate students to become involved when I find the topic stimulating. This is especially true of open ended questions I have no definite answer for but am genuinely interested in exploring. For example, I would genuinely be interested in students' alternatives to the formal school setting that could provide an education in the basics of reading, writing, math, social studies and science. This topic is open ended for me since I have no definite answers. My interest in the topic would help me lead the students in self-questioning and other idea-producing techniques. This in turn should produce a more interesting and creative draft for a final rewrite.

(3) Students are given necessary guidance in the writing process as it relates to their assignment.

Once an interesting topic, suitable to the level of abstraction of the students, has been chosen, I have to consider how to involve the students in the writing process. It is essential to keep in mind that the writing process involves the gathering of ideas and impressions, the drafting of these thoughts, then rewriting and finally polishing the product into the desired published form. Students do not magically know how to deal with

the writing process. When the composition assignment is given (whether in a composition class or content area class) the teacher must provide the needed guidance in collecting material or ideas for the draft, suggest how to shape or rewrite the material into a meaningful product and provide a means for meeting standards of correctness and form.

(4) The assignment specifies purpose and audience but does not dictate content or viewpoint.

This rather complicated task is simplified if the purpose of the assignment is clear in the mind of the student and teacher. Students utilize many thought processes and skills in each writing assignment. Focusing on the practice of one or two specified skills simplifies instruction and evaluation, and assists the students in meeting expectations. Defining expectations can be overdone. If the assignment produces dull formula papers students may be reacting to an overprescriptive assignment. Such an overprescriptive assignment might state: Write a paper of no more than three hundred and no less than two hundred words. The paper should have an opening paragraph that makes a statement you will clarify and support in at least three succeeding paragraphs. Each support paragraph should include one resource or expert opinion that is the basis for your argument. The final paragraph should restate your original point and summarize your supporting points.

(5) Teachers write the assignment themselves.

I find that I can test the actual writability of an assignment by trying to write it myself. Although I don't do it every time I make an assignment, I find it valuable reality therapy when I do. Student papers are the final test of the quality of any assignment. Of course, some groups

of students pose a more interesting challenge for us as assignment writers than others. However, I have found that careful attention to the level of abstraction, topic involvement, the writing process, clarity of purpose and audience as well as finally sitting down to write my own assignments results in improved student response to the composition assignment.

Terminal Park Elementary
Auburn School District

RETHINKING THE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Catherine A. Butler

Few aspects of teaching contain as much potential for either worry or joy as planning writing assignments. Witness the enthusiasm with which interesting topics or treatments of subjects are eagerly included in notes at workshops. Then there are the dull and lifeless papers a teacher corrects with the realization that the students did not respond to or understand an assignment that seemed brilliant or foolproof.

Sometimes I sit down with a bundle of papers and feel as if I were separated from my class by a gap. Often when this happens I realize that I did not voice my entire set of expectations. One such recent instance comes to mind. While driving to school one morning I heard a radio comedy routine by a British satirical group. The group satirized a children's show by teaching their audience how to do impossible things in one easy lesson. The spot finished with the reminder to tune in next week and learn how to become a brain surgeon.

That day I abandoned whatever I had planned for a writing assignment and looked forward to the fun students would have writing easy directions for difficult or impossible activities. But early in our pre-writing discussion I sensed a lack of enthusiasm, even a puzzlement, among my students. Once we began writing more than the usual number came to me with the complaint, "I don't know what to write."

Most students somehow completed the assignment; with diminishing eagerness I took a first look at the papers. The topics showed little or no similarity to those I'd heard that morning. They had been witty and clever and these were not. I then realized that I had been expecting

the paper I would write if I were a member of that British comedy team. My choice of topic and expectations were adult and my students' were not. I chose something they found remotely interesting (they liked the feeling they could do something patently impossible), but they lacked the crucial stimulus of hearing the recording that gave me the idea.

Part of the problem in such situations comes from concentrating on only two stages of the writing process: the beginning when the teacher borrows or devises a writing idea, and the end--the magic moment when the students turn in the products that fulfill the expectations. I realized that the focus I had that particular day had skipped the critical stage of composing--the actual writing. I hadn't provided the guidance the students needed to proceed with the idea all the way to an ending. I had put too much of a burden on the assignment alone, thinking its originality would invigorate and sustain my class.

Topics are after all only instruments of motivation, and part of our continuing problem with that elusive quality is that after students have been stimulated through the pre-writing stage, an additional, different kind of motivation is needed for writing the story down. The goal may be teacher instigated; but if students accept it as theirs too, then the needed inner motivation takes over, and the mental and then physical effort becomes worth it for them. Some of the lack of motivation is caused when we insist on a particular writing topic. It is critical that we replace this coercive manner with a student's active enlistment in the cause of a writing assignment.

But a piece of writing must be about something and that <u>does</u> mean a topic. We all realize that students write best about topics in which they have interest and experience. The older the class, the more variations we find in their

interests, making it harder to find assignments that succeed with the entire class. And with younger students the necessary experience relating to the topic must be more immediate than that provided for upper grade classes.

I don't find it a good use of valuable student and teacher time to wait for conversation to produce topics attractive to all. But what if the teacher-imposed topic is not equally promising for all the students? I offer this partial solution. If I sense that a divergence of interests is inhibiting inner motivation during the prewriting stage, I simply limit the extent of the language experience. Sometimes part of a story told aloud suffices. When it's obvious the writing idea isn't expanding enough to warrant being put down on paper, I comment on how we enjoyed the paragraphs we've heard and move on to something else. Naming the completed activity makes students feel they have accomplished something in the language arts period and lets them know their words and ideas still have validity no matter how they are communicated. More importantly, I think this technique saves them from an unfruitful writing experience.

Sometimes I provide unusual experiences for students so they all will have something to write about. But I often include common daily events in the writing program. The key to success in choosing and guiding an idea here is specificity. If we respect the child's world enough to ask that he/she write about it, we must point out which aspects or details of it we want him/her to share. The familiar titles such as "My Pet" or "What I Did on Vacation" are too vast, and ironically the student may feel there's too much. Students can focus on such topics when questions are phrased this way: "How Did You Get Your Pet?" and "Can You Remember What You and Your Family Did on the Night of the Fourth of July?"

Another benefit to a writing assignment on the students' home or school lives is that it

recognizes them as experts. The teacher's knowledge of their experiences at home is limited and students usually have perceptions of the school day and classroom which differ from the teacher's. This type of assignment makes it easier than usual to stress purpose for writing: to inform, remind, surprise, or amuse the teacher or recall, reorganize or predict data. These occasions can truly become what I once heard William Stafford term "opportunities to write."

Besides the motivation that we find or build into the writing idea through careful selection or sufficient pre-writing activity, we can rely on motivations within the student. The first of these is the fact that students want to feel competent and respect themselves. They want to succeed at tasks. Secondly, they desire personal acceptance by the teacher of what they give of themselves. And thirdly, they want to be liked by classmates. Writing assignments can have success built into them regardless of their content if they give the student a chance to develop a voice he/she likes, if the teacher responds personally to the writing, and if it is shared enthusiastically with the class.

What should an effective writing assignment take into account? Planning for it doesn't stop when a topic is chosen. The assignment that works with the student and becomes a tool in that young writer's hand provides guidance from the pre-writing to the rewriting stages with enough expanse of topic so students' choices can individualize the work. If I can anticipate accurately the actual composing, I try to prepare students for the decisions they will have to make. For example, I once asked my class how they thought the tooth fairy acquired her job, and I reminded students to give a full accounting of her former life in their fables (many fourth graders wrote that she had originally been a dentist). I prodded them to make a connection between the two stages by explaining how and why she changed

careers.

The writing assignment most helpful to both students and teacher is one whose purpose is expressed and understood. If the students and I discuss at the outset how a writing assignment focusing on character can sharpen their powers of observation and description, or how one with a strong emphasis on plot can give them a chance to show what they have learned about sequence and transition, then the evaluation helps everyone.

One of the most neglected aspects of the writing assignment is the audience. It's closely allied with purpose and if neither is specified, the student correctly assumes that the paper is being written for me in order to get a grade. In place of this vacuum I try to substitute an emphasis on both the private and social audiences. My students have learned to enjoy assuming the role of audience for their own compositions. They find this easier while working with informal, private writing experiences such as the journal.

Instead of the vagueness students contend with when they write for no one in particular, they can acquire a feeling for a presence or a consciousness into which their writing will enter. A two-part assignment that can help sharpen this awareness is the directive to retell "Little Red Riding Hood" twice: first for your best friend or brother or sister, and a second time for the principal. Once the audience has been determined and stated, students are helped by knowing about the intended readers--whether they will be a class of younger students down the hall or older students across the city.

Even better than planning one successful writing assignment is the practice of designing several at once. There probably isn't one best sequence that will work for all grades or students, but it's best if there is a sequence. References to past successes and future experiences are an integral part of many pre-writing

discussions in my class room.

One array of assignments that has worked for me in the past begins with functional writing (descriptions, directions, and reports) and moves into more overtly inventive work within the safety of a structure (retelling of folk tales and fables). The students next work with plots and characters of their own making and we finish this particular sequence with various autobiographical writing. The movement is from the practical to the explicitly personal. With some classes I have found students become increasingly willing to put more of themselves in their work as we get to know one another and trust is built through the sharing of ideas, feelings, and responses.

An enticing, glamorous topic does not guarantee success nor does an oft-used one necessarily preclude it. The stimulation that leads to a well-written paper that was enjoyable to compose follows when the needs of the students have been thought of first: their need to try a particular type of writing; the experiences they can translate artfully; an audience to aim their work at; the pitfalls they might encounter; and the skills they should use with ease. In this way, a writing idea that attracts a teacher's attention can be memorable for both promise and fulfillment.

Briarcliff Elementary
Seattle School District

The following books and articles have been helpful to me in my teaching and in the preparation of this article.

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"HOW TO GET SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT _____"

Richard R. Curdy

"But I don't have anything to say." "I can't write about that." "I know what I want to say, but I don't have the words." How often have we heard those objections to a writing assignment? Those difficulties can be met in a variety of ways--one of which I describe below. This strategy for generating ideas and "something to say" relies on the entire class, makes use of their collective perceptions and contributions, yet does not penalize the student who may have less vocabulary or experience in saying something about a film, picture, or piece of literature. This application has several contemporary forms, but it also harkens back to the Anglo-Saxon idea of "unlocking the word horde," of releasing the language treasure to deal with experience, which in turn is enriching.

First, the class shares a common experience--reads a poem, story, novel, play; sees a film or play; views a painting, maybe a piece of sculpture; goes on a field trip together. When it is time "to write about _____," I begin by asking, "What nouns or names would we need to say something about this experience?" As the students contribute, I write the words in lists on the chalkboard, or if I want to preserve this activity and start fresh with another class, I record all of the activity on big sheets of butcher paper which can then be tacked back up tomorrow. Using paper also enables students to share what has been generated by more than one class. Words naming features, parts, colors, objects--whatever can label a "person, place, or thing" in the experience--are recorded in this category. Depending upon the sophistication of

the class, I include terminology as well: foreground, jump-cut, soliloquy, etc. Students can contribute from their own expertise and I can show them how to develop particularity--in addition to clouds in a picture, a student may further identify them as nimbus, cumulous.

Next, we create a category for words that specify attributes--what kind, color, texture, shade. What feelings, characteristics, qualities are questions which lead to attributes. Again in this part of the generating activity extension and refinement of vocabulary come very naturally. From the contribution yellow a student or I could mention ocher, saffron or mustard to refine the idea of just what quality of color is being described.

The final category of words to be generated is verbs. "What verbs, particularly ones that convey the sense of action, would be useful in talking about, describing or telling a story from this experience?" I continue listing all the suggestions and asking questions to elicit more response: How else could you identify that motion? What is another word for that idea? What else is the character or person doing? What else is going on here? Then I ask for verbs that make comments or assertions about the experience or some aspect of it: What can you say about the subject? Make an assertion about the effect of some aspect of the work or of the whole work. These kinds of verbs lead to thesis statements and may be more appropriate, since they tend to be summative, at the end of the generating activity.

Not only does the class accumulate a lot of words--zero draft--but each student has the advantage of everyone else's perception and comment, which, in turn, may reveal some new insight into the experience for that student and lead to further contribution. The oral activity can be as much a time of discovery as can the time of writing. Each class member has access to this word horde that has been unlocked. Each

student then selects from the experience that "topic" about which he or she wants to develop a response--it could be an essay, reminiscence, cinquain, haiku--whatever form lends itself to saying what the student wants to be said. From the word cache the student uses whatever words are needed to elaborate the response, supplementing, of course, from his or her own private store. The point of view, the "thesis," the ordering and development are each student's to discover and complete.

This oral idea-generating activity has demonstrated for those students who don't have anything to say that there are things to be said about their experience; moreover, an abundance of words has been provided for the student whose vocabulary is insufficient. What remains is for each student to select and to shape a portion of those words into some sort of utterance which is uniquely that student's. The momentum and excitement created by the group carries over into the writing--generating interest, effort and pride in "saying something about _____."

Bellevue High School
Bellevue School District

SHADOWFAX

Karen Nordlund

The Shadowfax
A study in composition
High-stepping, a Tolkien namesake,
The Arabian steed singular in dappled elegance.
Foreleg poised in self-assured stride
Suggesting a stallion's impending motion.

Sleek smooth lines hide days of design revision.
High-glossed buff-white fades months of smelling
scratching fiberglas fabric.
Sun-baked oil gloss melts years of sawing, sanding, beveling, nailing teak woodwork.
Heavy bulwarks bury a lifetime of lifting, leveling, building keels and keelsons.

Like a spider, the builder spins.
The carpenter's cords criss-cross from drill to sander to saw.
The plumber's pipes meander through the hull.
The electronic technician's wires replace the shipwright's nails through the beams, fore and aft.
The anxious decorator's tape measure dips in the painter's bucket.

The Shadowfax
An elegant, intricate composition
Sleek, smooth, singular, self-assured
In motion.
The shipwright, the ship, the steed,
Yet, whose composition...
but God's!

Point Defiance Elementary
Tacoma School District

WRITING IS HARD

Tom Munn

I never liked to write; there were too many other things to do. I used to copy stuff out of a book, or I didn't do anything and got an F. Now I write all my assignments myself. Out of my own head. What happened was this class and the guy who teaches it, Mr. Franks. First off he told us that it's hard to write and it's hardest to start writing. I never heard a teacher admit that before but it's true. Then he told us not to worry about spelling and punctuation and grammar when we started writing. He said our writing didn't have to make sense. Sounded pretty dumb to me but I tried it. Almost everybody did.

We didn't start right out with writing. Mr. Franks had us do some crazy things like make personal name tags and draw our favorite food, animal, sport, and relaxation in the corners and like drawing our own coat of arms with colored pencils, writing in a motto we live by. Drawing and coloring seemed pretty dumb at first, right out of grade school. When we got into groups and started guessing each other's pictures, we started laughing and talking. Mr. Franks also asked us to write a list of twenty things we really liked to do and then he told us to choose one of them and tell in writing about one day in our life that showed how much we liked it. I wrote about playing my guitar and it's something I know about. I didn't have to look it up in the encyclopedia. Mr. Franks cares what I think about stuff, not what I'm supposed to think.

To get us to write faster Mr. Franks divided the class up into teams to see which one could write the most words in a minute. When he announced the third race everybody groaned. My

fingers were cramped up bad, but my team won the third race. I wrote almost twice as many words the third time as I did the first. Mr. Franks said we were exercising our writing muscles, kind of getting in shape. He said that most of his good writing happens when he writes fast. I don't know about that, but the composition derby was kind of fun.

One day Mr. Franks asked us to write about this depressing painting of a tree and a panther. I thought of getting up and walking out of the class. Mr. Franks said I had a choice. I could write about this other picture of a bullfight. I made up my own word cache about the picture--the dust, the noise, the smells, and the color of the bullfighter's clothes. Then I wrote about this matador and his little sister. I don't like bullfighting that much, but since I could choose I wanted to do the best I could.

There's one student named Ron who always comes into class laughing and jiving with the girls. It's a front he puts up because he can't do the work. He skips class or sits in the back and draws cars. One day Mr. Franks caught him before he skipped out again. He brought Ron over to my desk and asked me if I would write down what Ron dictated. I didn't want to. To tell the truth Ron scares me--you never know what he's going to do or say. I said O.K. He made a joke about me being his secretary and how about sitting on his lap. I didn't say anything. He didn't know what to say at first and then he got to telling about this time in junior high he got shoved into the girls' bathroom and all the cool things he said and did. He was going so fast I had to tell him to wait. When I caught up, he looked over my shoulder to see where he left off like he was president of General Motors.

When we got through, Ron grabbed his three-page story and took it all over the school showing it to his friends. I got kind of mad. Mr.

Franks had him dictate to other students too, and each time Ron would take his story to brag about it. One day when he was going out the door with one of his stories, Mr. Franks stopped him and told him to copy it over in his own handwriting. Ron got real quiet and looked Mr. Franks right in the face. I thought he was going to start yelling. Instead he just nodded and said that was cool. I don't know why but I felt better.

One time Mr. Franks told us to do some writing about this lighthouse. I couldn't think of a thing and the more I tried the madder I got. I said I couldn't write about something like that and a lot of other kids agreed. Mr. Franks read this thing he wrote about a thunder storm and a strange light and the bolt breaking on an oak door. It was about the lighthouse. If he could do it, I guess I could. I started writing.

Sometimes I wonder what is the use of all this writing. The umpteenth day I got my journal out to write for ten minutes and I didn't have a thing to say, Mr. Franks told me to write that. I haven't got anything to say. And again. I haven't got anything to say. Until you come up with another idea. I haven't got anything to say. I really don't.

I can see why I need to be able to write a business letter and fill out a job application. If I decide to go to college, I'll have to be able to write a good essay. Sure I can write stories and thoughts and feelings, but what good are they? I don't plan to be a writer. The only thing is that now I can say some of these things and write them down. Now I can go to the window and look out at maple trees and see one last leaf curled up like a pouch and hear the rumble of a truck on the freeway. You see I know what I am doing now. I can write it.

I can write.

Project Interchange
Seattle School District

FIRST GRADERS' WRITING

Carolyn Olson

In this age of accountability, when someone is always asking why a particular Johnny or Suzie can't read or write, somewhere at the top an investigation begins to find the "responsible party." As a first grade teacher, I want to shout, "Hey, wait a minute!" when the buck starts getting passed. I don't like my place in line. College instructors often blame high school teachers for their students' inadequate writing skills, high school teachers in turn blame junior high teachers, and responsibility is shifted from there to intermediate and finally primary grade teachers. If this were a logical and reasonable progression, I'd be in the ridiculous position of assigning term papers to six-year-olds who are still struggling with the alphabet. But I'm not sending my students off to do research because I know that learning is a process unique to each student. It has a beginning (somewhere) and many, many progressions, but it is never a completed package. Composition teachers are reviewing/rediscovering/reaffirming the fact that writing, as well, is indeed a process and not just a finished product of 500 words typed double spaced. This is good news for all of us, teachers and students alike. When we look at the experiences, ideas, and decisions that lead to the selection of those particular 500 words and guide our students through that process, we demonstrate to them that what they say is at least as important as how they say it.

Teaching first grade does have some awesome responsibilities. We set the stage for the many years of school ahead, and a good start is important. Maybe the beginning a child has in

school does have some long range effects that are carried as far as college. How can we know for sure? In the area of writing, however, I feel I am in a very enviable position. My young students do not come to school with previous failures or successes with writing. I do not have to concern myself so much with editing and revising (a tremendous challenge) as do teachers of higher grade levels. Creative writing is not a separate entity in first grade, for all writing--fiction or nonfiction--is creative because the child is doing it for the first time. Even copying penmanship lessons is creative for the children when they discover that their marks on the paper have meaning to someone outside of the classroom. Again, I don't feel obligated to guide and refine student writing as much as to encourage, support, and accept it in its early stages.

This does not mean that writing occurs as a natural phenomenon. I believe there are some very specific ways that I can facilitate writing in the first grade classroom. Parents and teachers are often dismayed about how little children seem to recall about important events, trips, and especially about "what they did in school today." Children do need practice in remembering, but I believe that what they need even more are the words to express themselves, to communicate what they do remember. They need many experiences with language--speaking, listening, reading, memorizing, role-playing, singing, rhyming, writing. Many of my students lack common experiences, other than television, and haven't the vocabulary to describe a trip to the zoo or beach, a musical or sports event. The only thing I can assume about my students is that they are six years old, and I have to start from there literally. Believing that good writing comes from actual experience, I set the stage for writing by providing that experience for them first. Atmosphere is a special concern of mine.

This means giving a great deal of attention to the senses: utilizing color and light, textures and movement, room arrangements, opportunities to taste, listen, feel, smell, and see new things. Children need constant exposure to the fine writing of others and many opportunities to participate in the writing process themselves. In terms of the process, the focus of most of my writing activities is at the pre-writing stage. Many of our pre-writing activities, however, produce some very respectable and exciting products.

Sometimes establishing the atmosphere for writing may just mean setting a pot of spicy water on to boil, filling the room with wafts of cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, vanilla. Certain scents have strong associations with our memories of persons, places, things, and events. Perfumes, medicines, flowers, smoke, cooking odors can trigger ideas for any number of writing exercises. The possibilities and combinations are limited only by our imaginations and what is available, and there is a great deal more available too--even at our fingertips--than we may at first realize. Music, of course, is a mood setter and sounds of common things take on a new intrigue when a screen is placed between the students and me. We arrange the children's guesses or associations into group poems. We expand the meaning of words like "soft" when we finger pieces of satin, fur, feathers, velvet, cotton, velour and suede. Giving each child an ice cube and directing them to touch it to their chins, foreheads, elbows, etc. is good for getting verbal responses from even the most quiet and shy students. And, of course, we do lots of cooking and tasting.

One multi-sensory activity I've used with great success takes a "scientific" look at popcorn. I tell the children that they are to be scientists, that scientists study things in as many ways as possible, and that they write down everything they observe. Each child is given a

"lab sheet" entitled 'Popcorn' with two columns headed "Before Popping" and "After Popping." In each column are boxes with sub headings such as COLOR, TASTE, SOUND, SIZE, SMELL, HOW IT FEELS, A PICTURE, HOW I FEEL ABOUT IT, and so forth. I give each child a few unpopped kernels to examine and ask them to fill in the first column with as many words as they can use to describe each characteristic. Then we heat the oil, add the popcorn, and begin to complete the second column. We pop many batches (in the interest of science, of course) so that each little Einstein gets the necessary data and his or her fill. There are remaining lines at the bottom, for children to use to write a story, poem or song about popcorn. The results are impressive. The level of sophistication varies from child to child, but all build their own word list from which to draw ideas and can usually complete a few lines with very little help or prompting. The approach is through science, but the activity is a Language Arts one. The children have used words to record sensory observations. Hopefully through this exercise and others they can eventually learn to use their words to excite the senses of their readers.

Creating an atmosphere conducive to writing may mean gathering some of the necessary materials into a quiet, comfortable corner. Sharpened pencils (colored ones) special pens, a variety of lined and unlined paper, book covers cut into unusual shapes, picture dictionaries and a collection of "story starters" can be stimulating for the motivated and more independent students to use in their free time. Most of my students, however, are more productive in directed group activities. Sometimes, for instance, I encourage them in an activity called "writing notes in class." We eliminate all talking, distribute lots of scrap paper, and must use written communication only during the period. As you might guess, this can be a tremendous

challenge for some. Children are free to move around the room making deliveries, but except for giggles over silly messages, there is minimal noise and confusion, and a great deal of learning taking place. Many of the notes are written to me because they are sure of an answer in return, so I try to use this activity when I can rope another adult or two--parents, older students, my friends or relatives--into the job.

Children can become authors long before they have the physical or phonics skills to write for themselves. This puts the job of recording their ideas on machinery and/or (most often) the teacher. It can be cumbersome in today's overloaded classrooms, but there are ways to vary such activities to avoid chronic writer's cramp or arthritic shoulders.

At Halloween, for instance, I like to have the children do a composite "spook story" which is relatively easy for them and for me. Children don't need a lot of encouragement to talk about Halloween. Usually they have talked of nothing else for a month and they have lots of ideas about what is scary from their own experiences and imaginings. I bring in a primary typewriter and record their spooky images directly onto a ditto master as they dictate. We begin, "One dark, spooky night . . . ." and they take it from there. Transitions and story line are not a concern so there is no real need for revising. We continually read and re-read what we have "so far." They delight in hearing their own words spoken again and again. The typewriter itself is a fascination for them. When everyone has contributed at least one idea, I leave a large section blank for the "authors'" signatures. I run them off and collate the papers at a recess or lunch break. Late in the day, with shades drawn, we gather on the rug, in the glow of a lighted jack-o'-lantern, munch toasted pumpkin seeds and read our spook story. The children listen, intently, eyes wide, and squirm with

pride when their contribution is read. Each has his/her own copy to take home and share. The incentive to read is heightened for a young child when the story in print is his/her own.

Opportunities to involve first graders in written composition occur all year long. Children write their own versions of stories that I have read to them (Charlotte's Web, The Wizard of Oz, etc.), give interviews for written biographies, create murals to illustrate favorite tales, respond to daily story starters, make entries into their journals, write letters to Santa, and participate to the extent of their abilities in a variety of other writing activities. Variety, as they say, is the spice, and I want my students to have as many different types of positive experiences as I can provide for them. However, I do feel strongly that those activities that stimulate new sensory awarenesses, get them moving, and give them support from the group, have the longer lasting impact. Remembering my own school experiences, I believe this to be true of writing activities at all levels. At their beginning, I hope my students will want to write down their ideas. I don't know if I can do more for my children than provide good models, stimulating experiences, and a supportive atmosphere for practicing their writing.

I love first graders' writing. I love to watch it happen: dimpled fingers wrapped around fat pencils literally engraving smudgey graphite into newsprint, tongues simultaneously tracing each word, the intense concentration, the pride of re-reading each new line out loud. I love to look at it. Sometimes it appears to be in a foreign language because of the absolutely phonetic spellings, but I've become adept at interpreting "first-grade-eeze" over the years. It's fresh, often tender, funny, thoroughly charming, and, for me, one of the greatest delights I take in being a first grade

teacher. I'm always stopping people--principal, teachers, friends, and family--to share my children's stories and written comments.

During the 1978 summer session of PSWP I shared samples of first graders' writing with composition teachers up through the college level and they appreciated their charm as well. Some expressed a wish that their students wrote with such honesty and fluency, and the question came up again, "What happens to change things as children move through the school system?" It is a valid and perplexing question, and I do not claim to have the answer. I would, however, like to make a contribution.

I've always placed great importance on creating an atmosphere for and taking a multi-sensory approach to school activities. It is an emphasis that most primary teachers take. I submit that attention to the senses should not be limited to the primary classroom. At the PSWP summer workshop, 26 teachers participated in a variety of my "first grade" writing activities. It was a pleasure to watch their animation, interest, and involvement. They examined popcorn "scientifically," they blew bubbles and wrote their feelings on colored construction paper, they pondered footprints on the ceiling, and enjoyed a puppet reciting poetry. The written responses from them were not "primary," but they were fresh, thoughtful and lively. A bit of childishness awakened, and it didn't hurt a bit!

One college composition instructor took his bottle of bubbles home for some more "back-porch" reflection, and later told me that his students would be blowing bubbles this fall. Teachers choose what is comfortable and workable for them and their students. I'm not suggesting the kind of activities you should use, but my "pitch" is this: Greater attention to sensory stimulation at all grade levels can help students to expand

their writing in ways that they couldn't or wouldn't otherwise.

Terminal Park Elementary
Auburn School District

THE ENGLISH CENTER

JoAnne Jugum

An English Center Program is a unique and exciting way of teaching English in the elementary school. Developed for the middle grades (4-5) where more sophisticated instruction is expected of teachers in all subject areas, the English Center makes it possible to have teachers with special training teach the Language Arts in an atmosphere enriched by a greater amount and variety of resources and materials. English Centers also foster individualized instruction.

The English Center is one of three subject area centers in our school; math/music and reading/science are the other two. On a rotating basis each class spends one hour in each center. Every teacher instructs in social studies. In addition, our physical education/art specialist sees each class on a weekly basis. Now in its sixth year of operation the English Center at Wedgwood Elementary provides a variety of activities and approaches and continues to try out new ideas.

The decor of the English Center contributes to an atmosphere that reflects something of the nature of the subject itself. "The Wonderful Words" by Mary O'Neill welcome all who enter the center. Literary maps and linguistic charts show the development of the English language; poetry charts, pictures of authors, and scenes from literature add richness to the environment. The room is heavily illustrated with student work; the walls abound with excitement.

Sun-bright tables with colored chairs on a carpeted floor add to the special quality of the room. The room is arranged so that students can function in situations involving discussion, reports, studying, as well as individual and small group preparation of work. Open spaces

allow for informal speech activities and listening experiences such as literature. Other more open spaces are provided for drama. The carpeted floor adds to the flexibility of room use and reduces noise in a response-centered and individualized program. All of this makes for a pleasant atmosphere for students and teacher.

Tables are grouped so that four or five students form a small group. This kind of natural grouping offers many opportunities for activities such as giving each group a limerick with the last line left off. Then I challenge each group to come up with the most original ending. Dictionary scavenger hunts are always popular. I give each group the same simple sentence and then see which group comes up with the longest, coherent sentence.

Some of the materials available in the English Center include: typewriters, audio tapes and cassettes, filmstrips and viewer, record player, overhead projector, linguistic blocks, (BUILD and Laidlaw Labacus), Seattle's Individualized Spelling Kit, tapes for literature (Charles Merrill), commercial games relating to spelling, language, vocabulary, and language conventions, writing kits, paperback material, hardbound texts, cabinets, bookcases, and storage space for writing and spelling materials.

To give you an idea of how exciting and challenging the center is for the students and teacher, I have listed some of our center's activities.

Literature: I read to the students every day and use a mural in conjunction with my reading. I tape a piece of butcher paper to the blackboard. Colored pens and crayons are available to the students to come up during the period to illustrate characters, actions, words, etc. from my daily reading.

Choral reading: Each student has a folder with poems included. During the year we add to the folders and take away. Students are always on the prowl for poems to try out in class. The folders are easily accessible and are used at strategic times, like a Friday afternoon.

Class Newspaper: On the last day of each month, the center puts out a newspaper of student writings. Students volunteer to be reporters each month to add a special writing of their own. Writings done in class during the month provide the bulk of the paper. Once a student sees his/her writing in print that student is "hooked" on writing.

Poem of the Month: On the first day of each month I present a poem to the class and urge students to learn it by the last day of the month. The month offers us the opportunity to work with the poem and find out information about the poet. Time is taken each day to hear someone recite the poem. The spontaneous clapping for someone who successfully recites the poem is very touching to see. At the end of the year certificates are awarded to those students who memorize all nine poems during the year. We also become inspired by Rachel Field's poem "If Once You Have Slept On An Island" and write our own version of "If Once You Have Been In The English Center," which is a fitting way to end a poetry-filled year.

Journals: Each student has a journal for writings that are not corrected by me. Our writings may be teacher or student directed. The journals are easily accessible for the students to use independently. I have a journal, too. As we experiment with language, I enjoy participating with my students. I believe it is important for them to see me write. One way we use our journals is during a silent-writing period. At the

end of a time limit, sometimes known and sometimes secret, we read our writings aloud. With the element of surprise, it's a very enjoyable experience. My students see me in the role of a participant--writing, making some mistakes, and trying to improve. I hope my students see me as a student of writing, too, and that we can develop a rapport of respect for each other as writers. With journals the class is the audience, not just the teacher, and feedback is from the group, not just the teacher.

Typing: Typewriters are used by the students to type spelling words, the poem of the month, and work they have written. I have a box of cards available to them with synonyms, antonyms, contractions, subjects, predicates, etc. The cards cover many of the activities in the center. Through the use of audio tapes students can learn the touch system for typing. All typings are turned in to the teacher.

Oral language: Each class period begins with ten minutes of oral language activity. These activities include: play Password with the class divided into two teams and team members give clues to their respective players; do a Mad-Lib by filling in story blanks with parts of speech; have a noun hunt by having students give words to list on the board that are observable nouns in the room.

Composition: Composition is a part of each period. Forms include journal writing, poetry writing, or writing a first draft for a paper that will go through the steps of the writing process. Oral sharing on a voluntary basis is equally important during the composing time. Illustrations, designs, and motifs are encouraged to enhance the appeal of the writings. Once a month a piece of writing is filed in each student's folder as a means of evaluating growth

over a period of time.

Writers Workshop: This is an area of the room that has a variety of writing materials, pens, and pencils for writing and illustrating. There are a variety of motivators for student use, also. At times a student will finish a writing and will want to share it with the class. I immediately shout, "Stop! Julie wants to read a story she just finished at the workshop!" We all enjoy this kind of spontaneous sharing.

If once you have been in the
English Center, you'll never
be quite the same.

Wedgwood Elementary
Seattle School District

PEER GROUP EDITING AND IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT WRITING

Susan S. Sailer

I edit what I write because it is a natural stage in the process of writing. When I first draft my ideas, I am concerned primarily with producing a flow of words that expresses the ideas in my mind. At this stage, if I monitor the words for their effectiveness, I inhibit the flow. Therefore I first capture my ideas in words as freely as I can, without censorship, hoping that I make very direct contact with my mind. After that I examine these words to see if they express the ideas I wanted to explore, and if they have, to see if I can improve their expression. Finally, when I am reasonably satisfied, I may want to share them with an audience.

These are three distinct stages in writing: drafting ideas, editing them to improve their communicability, and sharing them with an audience. I know that writing is a process composed of such stages, but many of my students do not. For quite a few, writing is a product arrived at mysteriously, something that happens between pen and paper; easily if they are lucky, painfully if not. Rather than see it as manipulable and occuring in stages, many of them view writing as composed of rigid rules, unrelated to their real selves, and necessarily tied to poor grades.

This view impairs their ability to write well, and so during the quarter I try to help students see writing more as I see it, as a quest to capture ideas or images existing at first only in the mind and then transforming them into words written on paper--an activity which matters to them and which requires their

highest levels of involvement.

Editing becomes important because it helps students write more effectively. Using small peer groups for editing works well with students ranging from seventh grade through senior high. I have not had experience with younger students, so I cannot speak for its effectiveness in elementary schools. One of the main differences between using it with older and with younger students is that while juniors and seniors can focus attention on the process for an hour, seventh graders do well to concentrate on editing for twenty minutes. The process itself, though, is similar for younger and for older students. I select concepts to work with in editing which are appropriate to the students' ages and skills levels.

Small peer groups offer some definite advantages over each student doing only his or her own editing. For one, a peer group helps the student become aware of audience, of the need to be clear for the sake of those who will read one's writing. A teacher cannot help the student develop this awareness as well as a peer group can because peers' opinions matter more to the student than do the teacher's opinions. Then too, the reactions of peers help the student become aware of himself as a writer and to take responsibility for that writing. Also, as students trade ideas about how to express an idea, or try to figure out why a sentence does not "sound right," they develop a sense that words are manipulable rather than rigid. If students are to become effective writers, they need to be able to mold and shape words and word flow just as they mold and shape clay. Finally, peer groups aid in separating editing from evaluation. If a student sees a grade on her paper, there is little reason to take the written comments seriously. When no grade has been determined and students together are pursuing how to express ideas effectively, writers have more reason to care about comments.

The old complaint of "What are your (the teacher's) red marks doing on my paper?" resolves into the question, "How could I say this better?"

Whether one has fifteen or forty students in a class, the process works. I begin by dividing students into groups of about four, either by random selection or by ability groupings or by constructing each group to have a balanced range of skills. I myself prefer the latter method, although how one organizes the groups does not matter so much as that one succeeds in convincing students that editing is a very important part of the writing process. If students view the editing session as a "free day," they will accomplish little. If they bring a high level of energy and a commitment to helping improve each other's writing, the outcome will be worthwhile.

Before students edit each other's papers for the first time, I model for them what goes on. I do this by asking permission of a student to use her paper for practice, making ditto copies for everyone, and then working for a class period on the paper. I ask the writer to read her paper aloud. After that, I tell students to read through the paper again and this time to look for what seems to be successful. When they find an idea or detail they think is particularly well expressed or a word which is especially apt, I ask them to point this out in writing on the student paper. When students have noted successes, I ask several to share their ideas, encouraging them to be specific. Rather than let the student editor make a general comment at the top of the writer's paper such as "Good word choices," I ask that he direct that comment to one or more specific words. We begin, then, by finding strengths of a paper.

In the second stage of the practice, I hand out to students several sheets titled "The Process of Editing" (see Appendix A),

which they will use at each editing session as an aid to the kinds of questions they can ask about writing. I prepared the sheets especially for students who did not know what kinds of questions to ask once they had noted mechanical problems. The handout is intended only as a guideline, not as a rigid checklist which must be adhered to in its entirety. It is a good sign when students become familiar enough with editing to begin asking their own questions.

After reading and discussing the sheets, we talk about the difference between correcting mechanical errors, revising passages to achieve tighter, sharper writing, and rewriting passages to try out a new viewpoint, a new set of ideas or a different format for the writing. I try to help students understand that all three kinds of editing may be called for in the papers they work on.

Next, students read through the practice paper to discover mechanical errors. I explain that they should point out the problem but not correct it so that the writer can benefit by doing her own thinking rather than simply copy the correction when she rewrites the paper. After students have had a few minutes to locate and point out errors, I call on a few of them, asking them to share with the rest of the class what they found. We are then ready to begin the final, most difficult, and most important part of editing.

Although I list nine expression areas in "The Process of Editing," it would be a mistake to ask students to check for all nine on the paper they are working on. I choose three or four which relate to composition skills we have been practicing during the past week and ask students to concentrate on editing just for these areas. I might select, for instance, amount and quality of detail, clarity of expression, and variety in sentence beginnings. Students then edit, focusing on these three or

four areas. I ask them to point out weaknesses and to suggest what the writer might do to overcome the problem. If they discover that a passage is not clear, for example, they bracket the lines involved, indicate where the fuzziness occurs, and suggest an alternate wording that would clarify the confusion. When the student editor believes that a whole section needs to be rewritten, he indicates the lines involved and explains why.

After students have practiced together on a paper, they are ready for their peer group work. I give an assignment with date due, at which time I collect the papers and look briefly at a sampling of them to get an overview of the kinds of problems students are having as well as to see some of the creative ways in which they are handling the assignment. It is very important for each student to meet the deadline because peer group editing cannot succeed if half the students have finished their papers and the other half is still writing theirs. For this reason I emphasize the importance of meeting the date due and deduct credit on the assignment papers turned in late. I check in each paper but make no marks on it.

The next day students pick up their own papers and move into the peer group to which they have been assigned. All students in turn read their papers aloud, after which they exchange papers and go through the same stages as in yesterday's practice: find and comment on the strengths; point out mechanical weaknesses; point out expressive weaknesses and suggest changes. I strongly encourage students to share comments orally and in written form while they edit each other's papers. This gives student writers a chance to defend their papers against misunderstandings and to clarify with the editor what the problem is. It helps the writers to remember comments better if they have heard the ideas as well as seen them in writing

When one student has completed editing a paper, she exchanges it with someone else in the group who has also finished. The student writer benefits from several perspectives on his paper, and the student editor benefits from the corroboration or disagreement of another editor.

If used at least five or six times over a twelve-week period, peer group editing can help students become more effective writers, not only because of increased awareness of their own writing, but also because of a clearer understanding of desirable qualities in all writing. However, if the peer editing is used on a limited basis of, say, two or three times over a twelve-week span, students may not have practiced editing skills enough to show significant improvement. It is important, then, for students to use the skills described above often enough that they internalize these ways of thinking rather than view them as imposed activities they occasionally perform.

When this editing process fits into a writing class which emphasizes improvement and growth as a total structure, students benefit from peer editing even more. To create such a framework, I monitor individual writers' growth from the first to the final day of my instruction. On the first day of a new quarter, I take a half hour writing sample from each of my students. On a chart (see Appendix B) I note their writing strengths and weaknesses as shown by the sample. I then ask each student to examine his or her chart and choose areas to concentrate on improving. I suggest selecting one or two areas of mechanical errors and three or four areas of expressive weakness. The student stars on the chart the areas chosen to work on for improvement over the twelve-week period. At four successive times during the quarter I take additional half hour writing samples and evaluate them only for the areas in which the student is trying to improve. An important part of the

final grade is the student's success in demonstrating improvement.

Another way in which I emphasize student writing growth involves the use made of weekly writing assignments. Each week students have an assignment due, which becomes the basis for the next week's peer group editing. After students have had a chance to look over their edited papers, I collect and hold them. When two or three sets of their edited papers have come in, I return all sets to students and ask them to select for further work the paper which they think shows the greatest capacity for improvement. They then write an ink copy for me, incorporating suggestions from their peer group as well as their own ideas for strengthening the paper. I comment exhaustively on this freshly revised paper, making all the suggestions I can which I believe would improve it; I do not grade the paper yet, though. The student rewrites the paper a final time, incorporating suggestions from me. When this last stage of the paper comes in to me, I evaluate it with a letter grade. In this way, a grade does not hinder the student from serious consideration of teacher comments, as so often does happen when grade and comments both appear on the same paper.

Students feel tremendously encouraged about their writing when they can see definite evidence of their own growth. Peer group editing and emphasis on improvement in writing through the process described provide a means for accomplishing this.

Wilson High School
Tacoma School District

APPENDIX A

THE PROCESS OF EDITING

Note: Not all the items presented in this schema should be used at the same editing session. The instructor should select some for concentration and ask students to spend their major energies on these.

Check for mechanical errors.

1. Circle all the words you are certain that have been misspelled. Put a question mark above a word you think might be misspelled.
2. Are the end punctuation marks all correct and effective? Are there places where an exclamation point or a question mark would be more effective than a period? Are there too many commas? Too few? Check with people in your group or with me if you're not sure.
3. Are capital letters clearly recognizable as such? Look at each word to be sure it is correctly capitalized. Remember to check on capitals in the title.
4. Is manuscript form correct? Margins? Paragraph indentation? Heading? Title? Legibility?

Check for aspects of writing that could be improved by revising.

1. Does each sentence have enough and the right kind of detail to help you "see" what's being described or to understand the idea being expressed? If a sentence would benefit from more de-

tail, out in the margin alongside that sentence, draw a straight line and write "more detail." If the writer should be more selective and condense detail, write "less detail." If the detail just isn't effective as is, write "change the detail" and try to suggest how.

2. Does each sentence make good sense as is? If so, tell the writer that he or she has done a good job of being clear. If not, draw a straight line in the margin by the problem sentence and tell what isn't clear.

3. Is there a reasonable variety in sentence beginnings? Scan the first four words or the first phrase in a sentence to see whether more variety would add interest. Point out where more work is needed.

4. Is there reasonable variety in sentence length? Count the number of words in each sentence and write this on your writer's paper above each piece of end punctuation. Is there an effective short sentence of, say, from 1-8 words? If so, put a star or asterisk at its beginning. If not, where might one go? Write it in the margin and draw an arrow to show where it should be placed. Is there an interestingly-structured longer sentence of, say, 18 or more words? If so, put a star or asterisk at its beginning. If not, can you find 2 or possibly 3 sentences which could be combined? On a sheet of your own paper, write out several versions of a longer sentence either combining several sentences or expanding a single sentence.

5. What makes this paper interesting to read, or is it a little dull? Look for

the following items, and when you find them, or others not mentioned which add liveliness, underline them and compliment the writer in the margin by writing "nice humor" or "I like your metaphor," etc.

humor
simile or metaphor
especially effective detail or idea
especially effective word choice
especially well-written sentence

If you don't find any items that add interest to the paper and help it have a personality of its own, try to suggest possibilities to the writer. Write one in the margin and draw an arrow to where it might go in order to give the writer some concrete ideas.

6. Does the order of ideas, details, sentences and paragraphs strike you as working well? Does any sentence or detail, idea or paragraph seem out of place? Draw an arrow to show where you think it belongs. Briefly explain in the margin why the change in position would be a good idea. Does any part of the paper seem to need more development? If so, where?

7. Does each sentence flow fairly easily from the sentence before to the sentence after? Especially look for jerky or disconnected but side-by-side sentences. Can you add any words or phrases that would make the connection a little smoother? By changing the beginning of a sentence, could you improve how one sentence flows into another?

8. Has the writer chosen dynamic, active verbs and concrete or specific nouns? Analyze and record this on your writer's paper by doing the following things:

put a star or asterisk by nouns and verbs you think are especially effective; circle general nouns and passive-voice and linking verbs. Suggest specific improvements if you can.

9. Do you pick up a sense of the writer behind this paper--a personal voice speaking through the words on the paper? Or does it read as though it could have been written by at least a dozen people? Does the writer seem to be involved and interested in what she/he is writing? Does the voice in the paper come through in a natural and direct way? Comment to the writer on how voice comes through in this paper.

APPENDIX B

ANALYSIS OF WRITING SKILLS OF _____

Scale: 1 (low) to 10 (high)

EXPRESSION	Diagnostic Length:	Assignment # Length:	Assignment # Length:	Final Length:
Writer's purpose focuses and directs ideas in paper				
Writer expresses ideas clearly.				
Writer organizes thought into main and supporting ideas.				
Writer develops main ideas with detail.				
Writer has a wealth of ideas.				
Writer used words effectively.				
Writer constructs sentences effectively.				
Writer projects a sense of self.				
Writer demonstrates creativity.				
MECHANICS				
Writer spells accu ately.				
Writer uses correct capitalization and punctuation.				
Writer avoids fragments and run-ons.				
Writer shows correct usage.				
Writer demonstrates correct manuscript form.				

WRITING WORKSHOPS:
THE POWER OF AUDIENCE

Ralph S. Stevens

My first audience, in a conventional classroom, not a workshop, was a group of undergraduates whom I didn't know. What I did know was that for the instructor to mimeograph my paper and ask me to read it to the class made me feel my writing could be more than "student writing," of interest only as a test of ability. I felt it could entertain, provoke, persuade, could be important for what it had to say. I'd never thought my teachers ever learned anything from what I wrote, had ever been stimulated or amused. And my teachers were the only ones who ever read my writing. Now, for the first time, I began to think of my writing as having the power to affect others, and to represent me in ways people would take notice of, and this simply because I had a genuine audience. I began to write better as a result.

Of course vanity had a lot to do with it. I wanted to be noticed and was willing to risk my prose for it. Not all student writers are as anxious to be on display, certainly, but if they know and trust their classmates even the shyest writers can enjoy the chance to be heard, and often they, more than the extroverts, crave an audience. The writing workshop provides an audience; the successful one develops members' confidence so that all feel encouraged to write.

The first step in establishing a workshop, then, is to get students acquainted so that all can like and trust each other. I teach undergraduates who come together for ten or twelve weeks at the most and for only four or five hours a week. They have little time to get acquainted, especially in comparison with pri-

mary and secondary school students. But undergraduates have social skills; they will adapt quickly to whatever level of courtesy and decorum the teacher and group establish. I spend the first class trying to develop a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, which means first of all breaking the ice, giving people a chance to get acquainted. This I cannot leave to chance. Coming into a strange room among strangers will dampen the most outgoing, so I must plan an activity to prevent this. Here is one of many: have students pair off, interview, and introduce one another to the whole class, using the information provided by the interview: "This is . . . she is from . . . and is taking this class because . . ." etc. The topic of the interview can, of course, be varied to suit you and your students.

I also take part in any introductory activity, and in all class activities, becoming as much the social equal of my students as possible. The teacher's role in a workshop is difficult. Leadership there must be, and yet without a visible leader; the teacher should not dominate. My presence as an expert and final arbiter in points of writing looms already too large in my students' eyes, even before I take attendance the first time. They are more concerned with what I expect, with what will get them through the course, than with writing. Rarely are they taking the course because they want to express themselves, yet that desire must precede good writing.

I certainly don't mean that the teacher's presence as expert isn't necessary, but that it should be felt indirectly at first. I can influence the writing process through assignments, pre-writing discussions and activities, and by encouraging only courteous and constructive responses to writing.

There is one other reason why I maintain a low profile in the classroom: student writers

should listen to each other, and they are less likely to do so, and less likely to contribute their own praise and criticism of each other's work, if the teacher always has the last word. No doubt writers listen to what a teacher says, and try to do what they are told, because of the teacher's authority, but they are more likely to take to heart, and, what is more important, act upon, the responses of their peers. It is true in writing as in much of social life: we are most influenced by the opinions of those we most identify with.

No cause for despair here, though. If students learn to respond honestly to each other's writing they will be making useful comments. All are, in some way, experts on language, and their expertise will increase as they frequently write, and read and discuss each other's writing. If I can become part of this group, as a member rather than as its master, I become one of its peers, and students seek and appreciate my opinions. And if together we come to trust and respect each other, we'll get the honest and intelligent comments we need.

Building rapport and trust, then, is my first goal. I am preparing for the time when students will be reading aloud to each other and criticizing each other's writing. Before that time, however, students also need to be able to write fluently, and this is one of the chief objectives of the workshop. Rapport with the audience in itself encourages fluency and is one step toward that objective, as I hope shortly to demonstrate. Another is to write frequently, beginning with the first session. There are many writing activities that provide useful practice in developing fluency, but only one that I consider essential in the first part of the course, free-writing. It is valuable primarily in loosening up the writing muscles, in freeing imagination, memory and feeling from rules and English teachers, and making writers aware of what they want, and need, to express.

The rationale for this technique I'll leave to those who have studied it more fully. Ken Macrorie deals with the subject in Telling Writing and Uptaught. Here I'll just discuss how I use it in class.

I begin by describing the method and explaining its object. I also tell students that I will read the work of at least some of them at the next meeting. The plan for the first few weeks is to center each class on discussions of these free-writing pieces.

Free-writing means composing non-stop for a specified amount of time, the pen never leaving the paper or ceasing to move, but instead recording whatever words come to mind. The demand to keep moving may make this seem anything but "free." but this is the only requirement. It is called free-writing because anything may be written, and if nothing comes to mind, that is what the writer records: "Nothing comes to mind" is of course, something coming to mind, "nothing" being a state of bliss few of us attain. So I tell students that they may repeat, as often as they want, "I can't think of anything" or "my mind is blank" or some such phrase. And I join the others in this activity. One of the easiest ways to become a member of the workshop is to do what the students do.

Beginning with the first set, I review all free-writing and select some to duplicate and bring to class to read aloud. I do this in order to accustom the class to sharing writing as a group, and to help build rapport and a common sense of purpose. Only positive comments are allowed (I bring in only writing that can honestly be praised). This is only fair, since the writers have been told that anything is allowed. To criticize would betray them, and the cause of fluency. In fact, there is a possible contradiction between writing freely and writing for this audience, which might throw doubt on the value of audience in developing fluency. In

free-writing the ideas, events, expressions that matter most are allowed to surface, without regard for propriety. But an audience, with its likes and dislikes, its unique standards, necessarily imposes restrictions. How can students write freely, then, knowing their work will be examined by others?

The answer lies partly in the power of favorable response. Writers know that whatever is good will be acknowledged, but that high quality, polished writing, suited to an audience, is not expected. Confident that nothing they write will be rejected, students feel encouraged to write freely.

And the answer lies partly in the nature of free-writing itself. It tends to evoke language that is immediate, lively, interesting, and thus praiseworthy. It is usually possible to find something in it the class can enjoy.

But the answer lies mainly in the influence of audience on the writer's sense of purpose, and here I speak not primarily of free-writing, but of writing in general. A critical audience can intimidate and thus inhibit fluency; a skeptical one can impeach the writer's purpose, and a hostile one destroy it altogether. But the other side of the coin is stamped as clearly: when the writer knows the audience is interested, friendly, her or his sense of purpose is enhanced, and fluency is stimulated.

This is why trust is important and why I encourage only positive comments at first. When students know others are interested in their writing, when they have come to see writing well as a common purpose, then criticism is not a threat but an aid, reinforcing their sense of what they can accomplish.

During the first, free-writing stage of the workshop, everyone writes frequently, myself as well as the students. As frequently we talk about writing. Writers see what others are doing, see that others share the same diffi-

culties and abilities for the most part. They learn quickly what readers respond to, and, in the best pieces, find models of what they might accomplish. And they are readers as well as writers, gradually gaining a sense of what good writing is, of what they are working toward. This sense of good writing is the second chief objective of the workshop, one which the teacher can do much to foster.

The first step toward developing writing standards is simply to talk about the free-writing, making some record of what seems good. Here, the class works inductively. I explain that our goal is to develop writing standards, and that we will do this first by describing what we like in what we read. After a few sessions I ask the class, as a group, to make a list of criteria, drawing on the reading and class discussions. To stimulate everyone's participation, I often have them work in small groups of three or four first, and then have a spokesman from each group contribute to the list.

After the free-writing stage, usually during the third or fourth week, I assign more formal essays and at this point allow more comprehensive response, including criticism, partly because, with some good will established, the class is ready for helpful criticism and because, as the group grows to trust me and not feel dominated by my responses, I can contribute more to discussions.

And response is more comprehensive because of the nature of the writing. While it would obviously be unfair to criticize free-writing, this isn't true for more finished work, of which more is expected. Papers are now written at home, and, being more elaborate and ambitious, offer more matter for discussion. And writers need not be threatened by more thorough analysis and criticism because they have the opportunity

to revise and don't see their papers as finished pieces yet. Thus, instead of taking comments as a final judgment on their work, writers use them as guides to revising.

A word about the teacher's contribution to the discussion: I find that often, if I am the first to say something about a paper, I am also the last. But if the class sustains a discussion well by itself, I can add my own remarks without seeming to take over. But I try to maintain a low profile even after the initial stages, though I take advantage of all opportunities to make the class aware of an important point. And I always try to end or rescue discussions gone bad, or resuscitate those gone idle or lifeless, sometimes by changing the subject, sometimes by breaking the class into small groups, or giving them a writing exercise. But I don't forget that our chief objective is to acquire standards of good writing, and I gradually introduce criteria of my own according to the sophistication of the class. I want to help the students develop a vocabulary for talking about writing and also become good readers. I say "become" advisedly because I assume they already are good readers in a sense, otherwise I could never have a true workshop. They are good readers because they have an intuitive sense of organization and structure and pace and argument; they know what is moving or thoughtful or funny, what is clear or foggy, swift or labored. But their responses need to be refined and brought to consciousness, and this is where the teacher is most needed.

Toward this end I am always on the lookout for opportunities to make a point about good writing. For instance, I usually point out the importance of concrete detail, of effective organization and development, of convincing tone and a sense of audience, and I always try to do this when the papers we are discussing provide examples. If, when discussing a paper, the class

seems to be dealing implicitly with an important concept, I may provide the term that makes it explicit: "Isn't what you are talking about here diction (or structure or focus, etc.)?" And then I'll go on to explain it if necessary. And because such aspects of writing (my list above is certainly not exhaustive) appear in the group's own work, our understanding of writing, instead of drifting down vaguely from an abstract lecture, takes shape in what we see, having an immediate, concrete reality. I will point out qualities I think the class should be conscious of, if they don't seem to be doing it themselves, but always in language they can understand.

If qualities I feel are important don't appear in the group's writing, I will bring outside examples for the class to discuss. Samples of the work of student writers are best because they seem within the realm of possibility for other novices. I try to avoid showing them work that appears to set an unattainable standard.

My remarks here do not pretend to describe all the ways in which workshop members become good readers, but I think they illustrate the objective. Class discussions of writing take the place of the written comments of the conventional writing class, and I think they are more effective. With the writing in front of us we continually see many examples of the criteria we set; written comments are at best an occasional, brief, general reference to such criteria. But to be effective, discussions must be intelligent and informed; students need to be good readers.

The workshop doesn't simply provide models of writing. It encourages writers to revise and thus to learn by doing, by correcting, by adding, deleting, changing. In my conventional classes, a corrected paper is usually a finished paper. It has been graded, returned to the writer, and filed (or thrown) away. The grade having been recorded, the paper's fate is sealed;

there is no point in working further on it. At best the writer can only decipher my brief comments and draw from them some principle of good writing to be applied to the next paper, if indeed it is applicable to the next, a new topic and hence a different situation calling, perhaps, for different kind of writing.

In the workshop, however, the writer receives more thorough explanation of his work, in person rather than through my curt marginalia. The response is live and, coming from readers and peers rather than from a distant judge who has no great interest in what's being written, compelling. The workshop audience, then, offers greater incentive than the traditional written comments to correct, revise, rewrite. The point is an important one. The conventional class can provide incentive to revise by offering an improved grade. But such a motive is ulterior to the writing itself. With a responsive audience, the workshop writer is likely to have more of a stake in her work, more purpose in communicating, and thus a better motive to revise.

The writing process as a whole is an integral part of the workshop. Depending on the nature of the assignment, I will spend time with different stages such as pre-writing, editing, drafting, proofreading. But of all the aspects of composing, revising is most important here, and acquiring the skill and patience to raise a story or essay to maturity is the third chief objective of the workshop. I always encourage, and often require, at least one revision per paper (after the paper has been discussed, of course). I encourage writers to listen carefully to discussions of their papers, take notes, watch the responses of readers to see which passages are or are not effective. With the information gleaned from the class sessions, writers are prepared to alter and improve their work as necessary. Needless to say, I always

make sure that at least a few instructive suggestions are made about each paper.

So far I've covered the three main objectives of the workshop: developing fluency, developing a sense of good writing, and learning how to revise. Though my theme throughout has been the role of audience in stimulating and assisting the writer, I don't mean to imply that this alone is sufficient to nourish good writing. At least one relationship other than writer/audience is vital, that between writer and subject. But in dealing with workshops I have chosen to focus on audience as its dominant feature.

I'd like to conclude with a few words about workshop protocol and management.

We've already looked at the importance of protocol in developing trust and sense of purpose. The way workshop members talk to each other and about writing influences vitally the relations between writer and reader. Here is a list I give my own students outlining a protocol I hope fosters useful discussion:

p3

1. Read papers aloud.

2. The writer should remain silent during discussions, and ask questions only afterwards.

3. The writer should prepare questions for the workshop, to be asked at the end of discussions.

4. Writers should not attempt to justify or explain their writing. The piece must stand on its own.

5. Writing workshops should talk about writing. Save the gossip for after class.

6. If you mention a weakness in a paper, try to suggest a way to fix it, but even if you can't, don't hesitate to mention it.

7. Avoid false, empty praise. If you feel like saying "Gee, this is great!" try to say exactly what is great, and why.

8. Don't, out of politeness, overlook the faults in a piece, but keep the tone of criticism gentle, courteous, instructive. Avoid a dictatorial tone.

9. Avoid the "sympathetic fallacy." Don't praise something simply because the subject is familiar, because you happen to agree, or because something similar happened to you.

Management of a workshop involves assignments, due dates, attendance policies, and grades, as with any class. And, as with any class, these things must be left up to the individual teacher. There are a few matters peculiar to the workshop, though, which I should touch upon.

First, assignments. For any writing course, assignment setting is not just important, but critical, and must be treated as a separate subject. I'll simply point out here that, with regard to the workshop, whatever assignments I make try to account for the workshop audience. Writers will feel most comfortable with topics their classmates can respond to.

Second is the matter of supplying copies of papers for the whole class. This needn't be hard to organize, but organized it must be so that students understand their responsibility and papers show up in class when expected. I've seen an entire session lose its momentum and purpose when expected papers didn't show

up. I usually give students the option of having my department mimeograph papers if they prepare the stencil, or of taking their work to a copy center.

Lastly, grades. Standards here must be up to the individual teacher, of course. I'd only like to point out that, in a workshop, a letter or number grade can be detrimental if not handled strategically. My "C plus" at the top of the paper may outweigh and even silence the more instructive comments of the class, so I postpone grades both until after discussion and after the writer has had a chance to revise. (This is usually no problem because I don't see papers before they appear in class to be read and discussed.) This doesn't mean that grades have no place in a workshop, but that they should be awarded at the right time. And they should be commensurate with the audience's opinion of the papers, the teacher's judgement included.

One last word. Most of us write for some reward, be it recognition, praise, reaching others or the pleasure of something well wrought. One of the built-in rewards of the workshop is the recognition and response of peers. I try to provide something more. It may be as general and intangible as talking about how writing furthers and even creates our understanding of ourselves, our experience. It may be artistically produced copies of better papers, posted in our room. The teacher can also steer talented students toward publication, or collect the best work of the class and publish it privately for the enjoyment of workshop and friends. The class can even have a public reading (a regular practice, for instance, of poetry workshops at the University of Washington). Have it in the evening. Invite family and friends. And make it a performance, a ceremony, a celebration of language and languaging.

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